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Participatory story sharing practices in the early years with Central and Eastern European families in Scotland.

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Abstract:

Since 2004 and the enlargement of the EU, increased migration from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to the UK necessitates sustained research on the implications for children, their families, and practitioners in the early years. This paper draws upon a sociocultural approach to bring into focus family story sharing practices. We report findings from an interpretivist study to foreground the experiences of two families living in Scotland. The findings indicate that story sharing practices can potentially be a meeting place for early childhood practitioners to engage with children's linguistic and cultural heritage, and can provide opportunities to listen to and build upon diverse cultural traditions. The findings also highlight that children's sense of their cultural and individual identities, as well as their sense of belonging, entail a complex set of interactions, and that embedding them into curricula and pedagogy require a sensitive criticality and open dialogue between practitioners, children and families. As a result of the findings, it is recommended that early years practitioners build upon story sharing practices as a means to engage critically with issues of culture and identity, and to facilitate the participation of CEE children and families in early years settings.

Introduction

Since the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU, there has been increased migration from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to Scotland, as well as to the rest of the UK (Moskal and Tyrrell 2016; Tyrrell et al. 2018). The reasons for this migration have been well documented and include the aftermath of the fall of communist governments in these countries, new opportunities afforded by open borders, and migrants' perceptions of a better lifestyle in Western countries (Sime and Fox 2015). Since the expansion of the EU, there has been an increase in research relating to this topic. This body of work has placed a particular focus upon migration to Western countries. Research in the context of EU expansion has tended to focus on migrant families where both parents are CEE nationals (see, e.g., Hamilton 2013b and Tyrrell et al. 2018).

Several studies have investigated the pedagogical implications of migration from CEE to Western European countries (Hamilton 2013a, 2013b; Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015), but studies that focus upon early childhood education are notably limited. This is a concern because practitioners working with young CEE children and families need to understand children's backgrounds and cultural expertise, as well as the challenges (Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015) and discrimination (Tereshchenko, Bradbury, and Archer 2019) they experience. At the time of writing, the UK has recently left the EU, and this is likely to bring further uncertainties and challenges for families with a CEE heritage.

Within this context, this article reports upon findings from a larger, qualitative, interpretivist study that investigated the affordances and challenges associated with story sharing from the perspectives and experiences of CEE families living in

Scotland. We will argue that diverse forms of story sharing offer rich opportunities in the early years for participatory engagement with CEE families. Scotland's curriculum guidance for the early years (Education Scotland 2020a; Education Scotland 2020b) recognises the importance of different story modes for early literacy and places emphasis upon learning experiences that build on children's existing knowledge, interests and capabilities. However, there is currently limited research to contextualise these phenomena within the social, cultural and linguistic experiences of CEE families. This paper makes a novel contribution to understanding CEE families' everyday lives and how children's interests and expertise can be noticed, respected and responded to within early years settings and initiatives.

Stories as sociocultural practices

This article is informed by a sociocultural perspective of learning in which cognition and culture are intrinsically connected and mutually constituted. Culture is a notoriously ambiguous phenomenon to define and our interpretation draws upon Rogoff's (2003) framing of culture as the dynamic practices, values and beliefs that constitute participation in everyday activities. As Hedges and Cullen (2012) argue, recognition of the culturally situated nature of learning signals the need for approaches to pedagogy and curriculum that recognise, respond to and build upon children's everyday experiences that are situated in diverse family and community contexts.

Drawing upon Jirata (2019), we recognise stories, story sharing, and storytelling as key components of young children's cultural spaces. We have adopted a broad definition of story, embracing multiple forms, modes and narratives including book sharing, oral storytelling, creative picture books, family anecdotes, memories and tales. From a sociocultural perspective, sharing stories, particularly between generations, acts as a

mediator of learning in the context of cultural practices (Gregory 2016). We argue, therefore, that stories have potential to act as cultural brokers (Walker and Nokon 2007) to inform culturally responsive and equitable practices that resonate with children's interests and identities across home and school cultures. As such, a sociocultural framing of story sharing upholds the rights of children and families to have their stories heard, shared and respected in early years settings.

Informed by sociocultural learning theory, the notion of "funds of knowledge" highlights the richness of experiences arising from children's participation in household and community activities (González et al. 2005). Moll et al. propose that these activities contain 'ample cultural and cognitive resources' (1992, 134) that educators can draw upon in order to develop meaningful learning experiences that strengthen connections between home and school contexts. Viewed through a funds of knowledge lens, multiple forms of stories afford possibilities for making visible, connecting with, and sustaining diverse family funds of knowledge in early years settings. However, literacy practices that draw upon funds of knowledge and storytelling traditions are often undervalued in formal education settings (Cuero 2010). CEE families can have rich repertoires of multimodal story sharing backgrounds (Keating 2018) yet such practices are frequently rendered invisible in contemporary educational discourse that positions oral storytelling traditions as inferior to reading books (Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018). This highlights a need for new practices that foreground culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Paris and Alim 2017) that value and build upon a multiplicity of story sharing practices and linguistic repertoires.

Narratives of homogenisation, marginalisation and invisibility

The author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie expounds 'the danger of the single story', detailing how stories can present a fixed and one-dimensional narrative by characterising cultural identities, values and practices in deficient and stereotypical ways (Adichie 2009, October 7). Robila and Sandberg (2011) argue that a singular narrative is amplified for Eastern European communities who are often inaccurately perceived to be a culturally homogenous group. This has important implications for story sharing practices and highlights the need for early childhood practitioners to be alert to the dangers of narratives that assign shared characteristics to CEE children and families. As Ang (2010, 43) argues,

> The meaning of culture, and the significance of valuing diversity then, is about recognising that cultures are not homogenous but heterogeneous, where diverse cultural communities can and should be differentiated both amongst and within themselves.

Furthermore, evidence shows that families involved in migration since the EU enlargement are disproportionately framed by negative narratives (Sime 2017). For example, research into media coverage over recent years (Gavin 2018) reveals a discourse of blame that constructs migration in terms of its threat to public services, national safety and the economy. Research by Sime and Fox (2015) and Tyrrell et al. (2018) indicates that families from Eastern European countries who are living in the UK have experienced abuse, with media reports indicating that xenophobia has infiltrated school cultures (as noted in an article in *The Guardian*, February 24, 2019). In a similar vein, research by Tereshchenko, Bradbury, and Archera (2019) found that Eastern

European pupils experienced racism and stereotyping in schools. These studies draw attention to the importance of raising awareness and challenging deficit discourses and racist narratives at an early point in children's educational experiences.

CEE families living in Scotland do not exist in a vacuum; rather, family practices are constantly changing and evolving as they come into contact with other cultures. González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) problematise essentialising constructs that reduce family practices to static, ahistorical and frequently stereotypical conceptions of culture. González (2005) argues instead that 'increasingly, the boundedness of cultures gave way to an idea of the interculturality and hybridity of cultural practices' (37). The fluidity of culture is evident in the context of EU enlargement, through which communities from CEE countries living in Scotland are in a state of change, with different cultures interacting in a number of ways (Sime and Fox 2015). This construction of culture places emphasis upon the dynamic qualities of family practices in which children are 'cultural experts' (Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015, 220), drawing upon hybrid expertise amassed from participating in home cultures and the cultures in their new country to play an active role in transforming everyday sociocultural practices.

Whilst it is important to avoid static, homogenising narratives of CEE cultures, we also recognise scenarios in which CEE children's and families' backgrounds risk becoming invisible in early childhood settings in Scotland. Hamilton's (2013b) research supports this claim and highlights that the 'needs, abilities, well-being and cultural heritage' of children belonging to EU families could be 'invisible' in British schools as they 'may blend almost entirely into the dominant cultural group within the school population'

(185). Sometimes this is intentional on the part of the child to avoid discrimination (Sime and Fox 2015). As such, we are interested in the potential afforded by story sharing for stimulating dialogue and critical understanding of the complex issues linked to culture, identity and belonging in early years settings.

Methodology

This paper reports findings from a deliberately small-scale study (Keating 2019) that was designed to generate in-depth understandings of CEE families' experiences of story sharing in early childhood settings. Through listening carefully to participants' experiences, our intention has been to share their stories rather than to extrapolate beyond the immediate context of the research. Nevertheless, the study offers important insights that are worthy of discussion, particularly in terms of the potential implications for practice.

The findings presented here are part of a larger study that aimed to understand ways in which story sharing practices in early childhood education exemplify Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in work with CEE families living in Scotland, and to explore ways this can be improved in the future (Keating 2019). Participants in the larger study included practitioners and CEE families, but in this paper we foreground the experiences of the latter. The literature highlights that there is a gap in understanding how the context of EU enlargement is experienced by families where one parent is from a CEE country and one parent is from the UK. This study, through participant selection, aims to address this imbalance in the research literature.

One family who took part in the research was from Romania. Both parents, Florin and Maria, are Romanian nationals. They have two children, Cristian (aged 9) and David

(aged 3). Their children were born in Romania, and the family have moved between Romania and Scotland a number of times since they first came to the UK in 2009. The children are raised speaking both Romanian and English. The second family comprised a Polish mother, Magda, an English father, Tom, and their child, Julia (aged 3). Both parents met in the UK and the family have been living in Scotland for just over 3 years. Julia attends a Scottish nursery, and she is raised speaking both English and Polish. Recruitment of participants was conducted through personal networks, posters on relevant groups on social media and contacting individuals and organisations. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to protect confidentiality.

The study contributes to contemporary narratives of migration in which young children are constructed as knowledgeable and agential. Such a positioning troubles the discourse that reinforces deficit perspectives of children which imply that they are 'unknowing and vulnerable' (Sime 2017, 7) and position them 'as luggage' (alongside women) in migration research that prioritises the point of view of men (Orellana et al. 2001, 578). In contrast, we have drawn upon Bushin's (2009) 'children-in-families' approach to acknowledge that children and their families are inextricably connected and that children are active participants in co-constructing and transforming sociocultural practices.

Data generation took place over a three-month period through the use of interviews and focus groups. Families were invited to choose whether the interview took place as a family unit or separately with individual family members. Children were also invited to participate. After the interview, families took part in three focus groups which included

the creation of a family scrapbook, with activities the whole family were invited to take part in.

Scrapbooks were given to each family with materials for use during the focus groups. Before each focus group, both families were given an information sheet detailing the topics we would discuss in the following session. The focus group activities varied, from making story-character profiles with similarities to the children in the study, to using an image of a tree with roots to stimulate writing and discussion about the families' history and associations with places and people. These activities followed migration research that uses creative methods to engage participants (Sime 2017), and activities involving trees and roots are often used (see, e.g., Orellana et al. 2001; Moskal 2010; Moskal and Tyrrell 2016). The methods were designed to be "person-friendly", as the creativity involved aimed to help both adults and children engage comfortably (Punch 2002, 337). The interviews and the focus group activities stimulated discussions, including about participants' experiences of story sharing in the early years.

Data were collected by audio-recorded interviews, focus group discussions, and through evidence from the scrapbooks. Data collection did not commence until institutional ethical approval had been granted; however, ethics was not viewed as a one-off consideration but remained central throughout. This necessitated a flexible research design that privileged a 'relational and emergent approach' (Chesworth 2018, 860), by which methods were adapted to avoid placing constraints upon listening to the lived experiences of children and families. For example, in one case, three family focus groups were not recorded because one child expressed unease and preferred not to be recorded.

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used to identify key issues arising from families' experiences. More specifically, the analysis followed 'a "theoretical" thematic analysis […] driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area', which made it possible to 'code for a quite specific research question' (Braun & Clarke 2006, 84). The findings presented in this paper were generated by coding the data to highlight salient issues regarding families' experiences of story sharing. In the discussion that follows, we draw upon the analysis to present three aspects of story sharing practices.

The findings are presented in narrative form, interspersed with our analysis and observations. The comments by families show a naturalised approach to transcription, as attempts were made to keep as close to the authentic conversations as possible, with minimal editing. Participants were contacted again as we prepared this paper, to reaffirm consent for their contributions to be more widely disseminated and to invite any comments they wished to make.

Findings

Story sharing practice as a potential meeting place for children's linguistic and cultural heritage

The larger study drew upon educators' perspectives to highlight some noteworthy practices in which Scottish Early Years spaces were using stories as a platform for welcoming and including children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, the participating families' experiences illustrate that early years practitioners and primary school teachers do not always capitalise on the resources that children and their families bring to settings. For example, Magda, who is from Poland and lives in Scotland with her

family, was asked if she was aware whether her daughter's nursery ever celebrated Polish culture. Magda replied:

> No, in fact I had quite an opposite experience, so there is one of the carers in the other rooms who is Polish. We were speaking Polish when I was picking Julia up, and then she told me later on somebody else within the nursery said that she didn't feel comfortable hearing us speak in Polish, so after that she stopped, and I was really upset and I said look, this is our first language, it feels really awkward to us to speak something else, and Julia's listening as well, I don't want her to feel ashamed of Polish, so I was very uncomfortable.

For Magda, the experience of being asked not to speak her first language generated negative emotions, made visible in her recollection of feeling 'really upset' and 'very uncomfortable'. We also see Magda's concern regarding the potential impact that censoring the family's linguistic background, and limiting its use in the early years setting, will have upon her daughter. Magda's experience suggests that she does not feel her linguistic and cultural heritage is valued and respected in her daughter's early years setting. Instead, her use of her first language was implied to be problematic, causing an issue in the nursery when someone reported feeling uncomfortable.

Family story sharing practices are tightly interwoven with linguistic identities. As such, Magda's response illustrates the ways in which the prohibition of a family language acts as a potentially exclusionary and marginalising practice within Julia's early years setting.

In a similar vein, nine-year old Cristian explained his attempts to bring aspects of his Romanian heritage into his classroom space.

Cristian: I ask, can we have the next topic as Romania, and they say no. Cos, they're like, anything we could do for the next topic and I'm like "Romania!", "No"

[...]

Interviewer: Cristian, did she give you any reason or did she just say no?

Cristian: No, no, she just said no.

Interviewer: and was this your teacher last year or….

Cristian: Every year

Interviewer: Every year? Oh, have you asked a lot that you want to do…?

Cristian: I've only asked it once to each teacher

Maria (Cristian's mother): So he just asked once per year.

Interviewer: I think it's an excellent question, and maybe one day, we'll see, maybe, yeah.

Crisitian: I've got, two more tries!

Cristian seemed to understand that children in the class are consulted to some extent in the decision making of curriculum content: 'Cos, they're like, anything we could do for the next topic?' This perhaps encouraged him to make his suggestion. Cristian's perseverance with attempting to bring aspects of Romanian culture into his school setting is notable, as is the fact that he has only asked once per year. This seems to suggest both his eagerness to include his cultural background in his school setting, but also his hesitancy to push this when he receives a negative response. Cristian also explains that he was not given a reason as to why the class did not study Romania: 'No, no, she just said no'.

Story sharing practices as opportunities to listen to and build upon rich and diverse cultural traditions

Incorporating family focus groups and the creation of family scrapbooks into the research design brought into focus the rich funds of knowledge and cultural heritage of both families. As we compiled the scrapbooks, members of each family shared aspects of their cultural identities which revealed diverse funds of knowledge. Through the scrapbook activities, the families also suggested how story sharing could build upon funds of knowledge to foreground their experiences in order to strengthen their participation in their schools and early years settings. As the following examples show, the families highlighted the importance of story sharing practices that focused upon intergenerational connections, traditional tales and family anecdotes.

Conversations with Julia's family highlighted the importance of intergenerational relationships and stories within her cultural space. For example, Magda, Julia's mother, commented:

> [Julia] does like one of the Polish poems which is about the whole family gathering around and trying to help the Grandfather get a turnip out of the soil which is really big and stuck, she really likes that poem, which means, everybody's sort of together and doing something together and she likes it.

Magda's interpretation of Julia's interest in this poem is informed by her knowledge that Julia enjoys the extended family being together, which does not happen very often as

they live so far apart. Magda also explained that Julia really misses her grandparents and often asks when she will see them again. Understood as such, we suggest that Julia's enjoyment of the poem can be conceptualised as a bridge that offers an element of connection between her life in Scotland and that of her extended family in Poland. Insights such as this highlight the importance of early years settings sustaining dialogue with families in order that children's story sharing interests and preferences are understood in relation to family contexts and circumstances.

In another focus group, Magda and Tom were invited to use the scrapbook to document their ideas about how knowledge and respect of parents can enrich story sharing in early childhood education. Magda's response highlighted the importance of gardening within her family. She explained its importance in relation to her involvement at Julia's nursery:

> And we did a gardening session so they were just looking for somebody to help them plant something […] And that was on my day off so I could do it […] they have a little garden, Julia was very proud of it, because they took photos of how we were doing it and then they were on the wall, and she kept saying "that's my mummy"

This example demonstrates how being able to participate in gardening at the nursery was a valued and affirmative experience for both Magda and Julia. Magda explained more about the background behind their interest in gardening:

> And [Julia] really likes helping with gardening at home, so that's something that she could relate to […] and I think, that is something that goes back to my family and how, it has always been very important for them to grow their own food, even

though, but I think it goes back to the fact that on both sides of my family, they came from rural communities, I mean, I know very little about this, it was my Great-Grandfather who still lived in a village, and both sets of my Grandparents moved to the cities, and I think that link has always been there, at least for me, so that's something I would like Julia to have as well.

This example suggests that the families' interest in gardening is indicative of funds of knowledge that have been passed down through generations. There is also a sense that this shared interest is dynamic and developing, as Magda and Julia used gardening skills at their current home and were also able to transfer their skills and knowledge into the nursery setting. For Magda, drawing upon funds of knowledge associated with gardening afforded opportunities to share stories that focused upon intergenerational family histories. Furthermore, Julia appeared to experience a sense of pride in her mother's participation in the nursery gardening activities. As such, we wonder whether the photograph that documented the experience acted as an enduring stimulus for recollecting stories of the event, thus serving to strengthen a sense of belonging within the nursery space.

The findings also highlight the potential of story sharing experiences focusing upon fairy tales, as illustrated by the following extracts from the data. In the first example, Magda explained the diverse versions of the same story that they encounter as a family.

> […] yes, so for example there are, well, even within the language there are different versions of each fairy tale, for example, recently we were reading Three Little Pigs, and in some versions it's far more graphic what happens to the wolf at the end, and in the other ones it's much more children friendly, although I don't

really agree with it, I think you should tell it as it is, but yes, there are differences, and it's really funny when other visitors come and read the same fairy-tales to us, so for example, my Czech friend comes and she reads it in English but she also adapts it a little bit, so again she, so I think Julia is used to the fact that each person reads the same story but it's a slightly different story each time.

Magda also explained that she and her husband bring different experiences of fairy tales to their family, from their different backgrounds:

I would say yes definitely we have different cultural experiences. And we have different fairy tale, I would say, repertoire, each of us.

The use of the word 'repertoire' frames the background of stories each partner brings as a rich collection or skillset. In these examples, Julia's transnational life is brought into focus and highlights her experience of engaging with diverse interpretations of the same tale. Magda reflected on the oral storytelling she experienced in her own childhood by her grandparents, explaining that,

they told me a lot of stories, orally, without anything written.

Furthermore, Magda explained that her storytelling with Julia includes both oral storytelling and reading from books:

recently I started telling her fairy tales that I know without, looking for the text so I'm just telling her the gist of it, and she's very captivated with it.

These examples suggest that the telling of fairy tales has enabled Julia to participate in family story sharing practices characterised by diverse content and modes. We argue that

such experiences are rich in potential for informing practices in early years settings that recognise and build upon children's home-based, multimodal literacy practices.

The family interviews and focus group activities also elicited examples of personal anecdotes as a form of storytelling. The following example shows this mode of telling stories to be popular in Cristian and Maria's family.

> Interviewer: Do you as a family sometimes tell stories from your own experience, like maybe mum and dad tell you stories from their family, or Grandma and Granddad...
>
> Maria: I think we are telling all the time,
>
> Cristian: Especially in the car
>
> Maria: So every time we remember, from one topic we just jump straight to a different topic and we start telling. So all the time we are remembering from our childhood or something that we've been through.

Cristian then went on to share a story about a funny incident with his mother when she was younger, and everyone laughed a lot.

In the interview with Magda, we spoke further about the storytelling she had experienced from her own grandparents as a child. When asked if the stories she heard were fairy tales, or specific Polish stories, Magda reflected on storytelling based on experiences relevant to her grandparents, as well as traditional tales. She explained:

it would be fairy tales, but it would also be sort of, they would tell me a story of somebody that they heard about, and a particularly striking story of something that happened.

These examples show how storytelling for both families is multimodal and includes oral storytelling and anecdotes. The findings emphasise the wealth of stories both families have amassed from a range of sources, and the different forms that are utilised to express stories.

Story sharing practices that recognise culture as dynamic and interwoven, and that are sensitive to children's contexts

The following examples show that, in the context of EU migration, children can experience multiple relocations, and children possess cultural resources and expertise as boundary crossers. As Maria explained:

First time we came in the UK in 2009 and we've stayed for a couple of months. And second time we came in 2012 and we've been here for almost one year, and go back to Romania, and come back in 2016. We are going to Romania once per year normally, but if something's unexpected, we can go, more often.

This example shows that Maria's family have extensive experience of living in both Romania and Scotland and migrating between the two. In the final focus group, we discussed Maria's perspectives about the family's identity:

I think we are transnationals, yeah. I think we identify ourselves in both of the cultures, and we embrace Scottish as like Romanian, like a native one, so, it's a blend between the two cultures, that's what I think.

For Maria, her family's identity is not dichotomised, but rather 'a blend between the two cultures' in which their cultural identities are interconnected. Likewise, the following extract demonstrates the dynamic and interwoven characteristics of Julia's culture, as a child who was born and raised in a context of EU enlargement. As discussed earlier, Julia's mother Magda is Polish, her father Tom is English, and they currently live in Scotland. During the second focus group, the family were asked about how they identify:

Magda: I don't think I think of us as a migrant family

Tom: Yeah, I don't think of us as a migrant family, I think of us as a European family

Magda: Yeah, because I don't feel, like, you know, I don't feel uprooted in a sense, I know there is a lot of talking about being uprooted, I don't feel that way at all, I just feel, that this is a place where we belong.

Magda and Tom spoke about the impact the enlargement of the EU had had for them by enabling them to meet, travel to and live in different places. There was a sense that being a 'European family' added a richness of experience to their lives. As a 'European family' the household draw upon multiple funds of knowledge as they participate in everyday sociocultural activities. For example, while compiling the scrapbook, Magda and Tom talked about the importance of cooking for the family:

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Magda: And I think something that comes from both of our families, is that

people and families unite around cooking together and eating together.

Tom: Yes, yeah

Interviewer: Where did you say that comes from?

Tom: From both sides of our families,

Magda: And Julia likes doing this with us as well, when we're cooking, she likes

to get involved.

These insights highlight the dynamic qualities of family histories and practices and

signal the need for early years practitioners to gain informed understandings of family

circumstances in order to avoid narratives that impose stereotypical and static framings

of children's and families' identities and experiences.

In the following example, Magda was reflecting upon the connections that Julia makes

with the books she reads at the nursery and at home. Magda commented:

I know that the things we read she really relates to, so for example she really

likes the theme of mummy not being there, I've noticed, it's maybe because I

work, or I sometimes have to fly to London, and so she's used to that, and I

know she doesn't particularly like it, but there is, a poem about a sister looking

after a little brother, and she really likes me reading it, and particularly the part

where it says mummy's not there, but the little boy is ok because the sister's

there. And then when we read Pippi Longstocking as well in Polish, she at first

said 'so her mummy has died, what does that mean she's not there'? So, every

now and then when we're reading the story and she comes back to the fact that Mummy's not there, and I say no, she's not there, and she says "Daddy's sailing away, but he will come back will he?" So I think she's trying to deal with the fact that not everybody has their parents all the time with them, so I know that these stories do help her, just to process the idea of it.

This example implies that Julia is drawn to stories with themes that resonate with her family context and experiences. Magda's understanding of Julia's circumstances enables her to interpret why particular stories might interest Julia. It is possible that without this understanding of family circumstances, early years practitioners might miss opportunities to use favourite stories to make connections with children and build upon their experiences and interests.

In the following example, Maria and Cristian were talking about their experience of participating in a storytelling event through a third sector organisation. They had shared a Romanian tale and translated it into English for other children to hear. As we talked about their experience, Cristian initially indicated that he would not like to do something similar at his school. Further discussion suggested that might be due to Cristian's level of confidence in translating. Cristian's growing competency in English meant he was at times more confident in his second language, English, and the idea of mediating content between his two languages, Romanian and English, appeared to be daunting. However, he respected his mother's skills as translator, saying 'I can't translate the story but mum could tell you' and explaining that he would be comfortable for her to come into school and tell a story.

Cristian's expressed reluctance to share a Romanian tale highlights the nuances and complexities of children's movements between home and school cultures. Whilst practitioners need to respect children's cultural expertise, this example emphasises the need for a sensitive approach that is attuned to what children are comfortable to share, and how.

In this section we have presented selected examples from the data to show how the interviews, focus groups, compilation of family scrapbooks and the associated conversations enabled the two families' experiences to be made visible. As Tom explained:

> So, it's about recognition. Things are done differently in different cultures because of languages and traditions, then just acknowledge that, and accept that, that that's ok to do, rather than "we do it this way", it's the shutting down of the thought processes which is more detrimental than anything else.

In the discussion that follows, we argue that story sharing is uniquely positioned to enable a re-centring and respectful engagement with children's and families' lives.

Discussion

Genishi and Goodwin (2008, 278) assert that 'children are only at risk of failing in school when curricula leave no room for their multiple interests and identities'. Whilst acknowledging the small-scale nature of the study, the findings nevertheless illuminate the possibilities that diverse forms of story sharing afford for children to enact their participatory rights as 'cultural experts' (Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015, 220). Through these stories, children actively construct transnational identities (David and Kilderry

2019) by making meaning of their linguistic heritages and sociocultural practices. Such acts of meaning-making cultivate children's motivation to learn in contexts that have relevance to their everyday experiences, relationships and histories (Chesworth 2016; Hedges 2019). For this to occur, we argue that story sharing practices in early years settings need to sustain CEE family languages, have relevance for household practices and affirm children's dynamic cultural identities. The early years practitioners who contributed to the larger study revealed several ways that this is already happening in the Scottish context of early years education. For example, one participant described training given for a national early years book programme that encourages sessions to recognise and respect diverse languages and cultural practices. Another practitioner spoke about how she ensured that classroom resources included bilingual books and stories that reflected children's diverse cultural lives.

These instances offer promising examples to inform the development of culturally relevant story sharing practices. However, the experiences of children and families that we have presented in this article illuminate instances in which this was not the case. Instead, CEE family practices, languages and histories were sometimes excluded or rendered invisible within schools and early years settings. These families' stories highlight critical issues regarding the extent to which early childhood education places restrictions upon the participatory rights of children in CEE families living in Scotland. Since the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007 there has been limited training for education practitioners working with CEE communities (Hamilton 2013b), an issue that was confirmed by the educators who participated in the wider study. This signals an urgent need for early years practitioners to have access to professional learning that facilitates dialogue and critical reflection upon their work with CEE children and

families. In this way, the findings contribute to an international call to transform preservice and continuing professional development to enable early childhood practitioners to engage in critically inclusive, equitable and culturally relevant practices (Souto-Manning and Winn 2019).

Honouring diversity in story sharing practices must be addressed in tandem with support for practitioners to enact critical understandings of the complex issues that produce and reinforce inequality and xenophobia towards CEE children and families living in Scotland. The stories we have presented in this paper are entangled with broader social, cultural, economic and political narratives that exert powerful influences upon the experiences of young CEE children. For example, EU enlargement has taken place against a political backdrop for immigration in the United Kingdom that prioritises social integration and homogenisation (Fashanu, Wood, and Payne 2020). This discourse reproduces a deficit narrative of diversity in which CEE children are minoritised through practices that exclude, or are ambivalent towards, families' languages, experiences and histories (Little 2020). We therefore agree with Robinson and Diaz (2006, 8) that:

> Early childhood educators are in an ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families. This is possible not only on the broader level of advocating for their rights, but also challenging and disrupting normalising discourses through the curriculum that we teach, the policies that inform our practice and the pedagogies that we utilize in teaching children.

With this in mind, we argue that early childhood education settings can act as sites of advocacy for children's and families' rights, challenging and disrupting single story narratives by sharing and sustaining a diversity of cultural practices, beliefs and values (Louie and Davis-Welton 2016). In this vein, multimodal and multilingual modes of story sharing can become springboards for critical reflection and dialogue between practitioners, children, parents and carers.

Conclusion

The research reported in this article highlights the importance of establishing and sustaining collaborative relationships with CEE families to co-construct stories that affirm cultural identities and recognise the heterogeneity of children's experiences. Listening carefully to families' multilingual and multimodal stories can enable practitioners to gain in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of children's diverse identities, languages, experiences and histories. Further research is needed to better understand how story sharing affords possibilities for co-constructing learning that draws upon CEE families' funds of knowledge and linguistic practices whilst also recognising that young children's transnational identities are complex, multifaceted and dynamic.

Declaration of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest.

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